3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

by a statement issued by Prince William Baptist Church as late as May 20, 1865:

> Found the following coloured members have deserted their homes, the homes of their owners and their church and we fear the Cause of God. They were excommunicated. Boston, Amy, Sallie, Jane, Hannah, Jerry, Ellen, Ransom, Rina, Abraham, Annie, etc. . . .[67]

In attempting to regiment male-female relations in the slave quarters Baptist slaveholders demonstrated the most hypocrisy and cynicism. Masters separated families by whim and will regardless of religious convictions. Baptist planters sold "Christian" slaves without trying to rationalize such sales in correspondence with the laws of God even when these sales fragmented families. "I give to my son Alec, a son of my wench, boy named Jimmy," wrote Joseph Lawton, the "illustrious" pastor of Black Swamp Church at Robertville where elaborate galleries for slaves and free blacks were constructed in 1824. Slaves lived in constant dread of separation. "Every slave know what, 'I'll put you in my pocket sir,' mean" said former Robertville slave Isaiah Butler. A Northern Baptist published an appeal to slaveholding Baptists which contained an 1835 advertisement taken from a Southern newspaper. It was a notice of an auction telling "its own sad tale," and was a comment on Southern clergymen's rationalization about slavery. The "property" of the estate of "the late Rev. Dr. Furman," prominent Charleston Baptist and supporter of religious instruction for slaves, was for sale. Aside from three lots of land and a library, there were: "27 Negroes, some of them prime, two mules, one horse and an old wagon."[68]

Yet despite frequent forced family breakups, the church was particularly pharisaical in pretending that slaves were free agents. Gullahs considered "guilty" of "adultery," for example, were excommunicated as a general rule, for according to biblical law it was a sin to "put away" one's wife or husband. This ludicrous issue was debated, however, and the charge rescinded if an individual went before the church via the black watchman or white brother in charge and asked permission to "remarry."[69] Few Gullahs took this step, seeming to prefer exercising their independence insofar as they could within a forced situation. The folly of this supposed violation of scripture was not lost to their intelligence, and they usually ignored such censures.

Slaves' wishes in choosing a mate were sometimes ignored, and unions

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
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175 567 584 were neither sanctioned in law nor respected by slaveholders. Still Baptist churches "devoutly" passed sentence upon Gullahs for "adultery" and "fornication." Perhaps this gesture aimed at giving Gullahs a false send of equality—the same laws for both races regardless of circumstances, as implied by the Savannah River Baptist Association.[70] Possibly this an attempt to demoralize and humiliate—main ingredients of Christianity as taught to slaves. In the interest of "order" and cupidity, masters sometimes denied legitimacy to slaves' emotional inclinations, forcing couples to live together against their will because of convenience and profitability. According to Sam Mitchell, on the Chaplin plantations a slave had to tell the master as soon as he began to "cote." Mitchell added, "If Maussa say 'no you can't marry dat gal' den dat settle it, you can't marry um. He don't lak his slave to marry on nodder puson plantation." In like manner, Harry McMillan testified before the Freedom Inquiry Commission:

> A man saw a young woman and if he liked her he would get a pass from his Master to go where she was. If his owner did not choose to give him the pass he [the master] would pick out another woman and make him [the slave] live with her whether he loved her or not.[71]

Under these oppressive circumstances, where personal preference was ignored, Gullahs understandably had no respect for the church edict establishing rules of conduct about marital status and decisions.

175 [836] [583] Among Gullahs no stigma was attached to sex without marriage as defined by white society. When asked what proportion of young women had sexual intercourse prior to marriage, Robert Smalls replied the majority did but "it was not considered an evil thing." When individuals settled with mates of their choosing he added, such unions were considered binding. Smalls explained male-female relations among the Gullahs:

[587] [765] If a woman loses her husband she mourns for him and will not marry again for a year and a half, unless she is driven to it by want and must have somebody to help her. . . .

[586] . . . You hardly ever find a husband will separate from his wife except he finds her going with another man. . . . very few . . . married women are carried away by sexual passion if their husbands can take care of them.[72]

175 567 581 597 Church minutes, then, belie the actual situation by stressing stealth and immorality among the Sea Island region's black population. Gullahs simply operated under a different moral code. Thomas Chaplin, noted

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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Mrs. Mary Pinckney

IT'S TOUGH TO RAISE FIVE CHILDREN—SURE IS

I get married to the church. And I had the reception in Robbie Fields' store. They had wine and piccolo playing, and dancing. I danced once. But I couldn't dance 'cause my dress was too long. Long white dress, white shoes and white veil 'cross my hair. Lot of people came to the church and lot of people at the store. They had as much in the yard as was in the store, couldn't come in. I guess 'round about three hundred head. Big wedding.

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We was young children, growing up together. I met him long time ago, but I didn't realize that was to be my husband today. I remember he was picking the potato on the farm and I had to go work that morning and he

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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•584 was there. I didn't have no partner to pick up potato with, so he say, "Come on; I'll be your partner." So we was partner for the day, picking up potato until over with. And when I get 'round about fifteen, sixteen years old, he come to my house and ask my mother can he keep my company. My mother ask me, will I accept it. First I say I don't know. So he come back and come back. And finally he wrote my mother a letter. Mother call me, she ask me, will I accept Arthur Lee company. So I say yes.

Those years keeping company I doesn't go out with no fellas, but I does see other boys, talk to them, go out to a party my brother be along. But I never love but one, and that's the one I get married to.

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401 Now I'm twenty-five. I have five children. I work from seven in the morning 'til five-thirty in the evening—five days a week doing kitchen work. I mind five children, and when I get home I got to take care of five of my own.

My husband leave home 'bout six in the morning for he to wait on the road for a ride to go to work. He don't have he own transportation. He works out on contractor job, 'round about four years now.

(465) It's tough to raise five children—sure is. My husband make 'round thirty, sometime forty dollars a week. And if it rain he don't bring in that because he don't work. I get paid for holiday when I'm off, but my husband don't get paid. He just have to wait it out. My mother used to take care of (855) the children that aren't in school before the house burn down, but now I don't have anyone to take care of them. I have to stay off from work and start all over housewife again.

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11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

567 men may have, for instance, as many wives as they please, so long as they do not quarrel about such matters."[18] [177] [595] Nevertheless, most planters insisted that their slaves give up their African customs of polygamy and accept the Christian standard of monogamy as the rule of their family life.

567 177 584 St. Helena planters quite generally required their slaves to choose a mate for life, and they attempted to impress the solemnity of the marriage upon the contracting parties by the observance of a ceremony. The engagement of a slave couple was formally recognized on the plantation when the black man asked the master's permission to marry, designating specifically the chosen girl. Many owners encouraged their men to choose from among the girls of their own plantations, but they did not always insist upon it.[19] A man might select his wife from another plantation on the Island, but if he did so he must suffer the inconveniences of not having a woman to look after his clothes, grind his corn into grits, and cook his meals. On the other hand, a wife on a neighboring plantation gave the husband an excuse for leaving his own plantation frequently.

567 585 177 Upon gaining permission to marry, the couple might request that the ceremony be performed at once, whereupon the planter, if without too many religious scruples, might informally "pronounce" them man and wife. The master was more likely to insist, however, upon a marriage by a white preacher or by one of the religious leaders

[18] Hall, *Travels in North America*, II, 216.

[19] Mr. J. Swinton Whaley, of Little Edisto Island, possesses today a bill of sale for a Negro girl his father paid $1,200 for in order that one of his slaves might have the wife he loved.